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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that cross-cultural training aimed at improving cultural sensitivity and awareness is a must for students and management trainees pursuing careers with international businesses and for U.S. companies actively seeking strategic alliances with foreign partners. It further argues that understanding the ego states of the parties involved and using this information as an analytical tool when devising training programs will help businesses succeed and ultimately survive in global competition. The paper examines the different ego states in cross-cultural interaction (child ego, parent ego, and adult ego); and the patterns of cross-cultural interaction as they would be experienced in persons meeting with the following ego states: child-to-child; parent-to-parent; adult-to-adult; parent-to-child; adult-to-parent; or adult-to-child. It is noted that cultural differences alone do not necessarily cause negative experiences in cross-cultural communication, and that it is only when the message sender's ego state is not compatible with that of the receiver that cultural differences between the parties become problematic and start to generate negative experiences and impede effective communication. Contains 18 references. (GLR)

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Understanding Ego States

-A Prerequisite for Cross-Cultural Training-

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Introduction

In the ever changing global business environment, strategic alliances with foreign partners are becoming important survival options for today's multinational companies. Any form of strategic alliance, however, requires a significant amount of cross-cultural interaction. If this interaction is not of a positive nature, it is clear that the benefits and advantages of such alliances can never be fully realized. Unfortunately, many mutually beneficial strategic alliances have been aborted in the middle of negotiations, or even before, simply because of the cultural insensitivity of the parties involved. The sad fact is that nobody knows exactly how many business opportunities have been missed in this manner.

Consequently, cross-cultural training aimed at improving cultural sensitivity and awareness is a must for students and management trainees pursuing careers with international businesses and U.S. companies actively seeking strategic alliances with foreign partners. Understanding the ego states of the parties involved and using this information as an analytical tool when devising training programs will help businesses succeed and ultimately survive in this global competition.

Literature Survey

As Harrison (1990) correctly categorized, most of the cross-cultural training programs fall into one of the two following categories: 1) cognitive approaches or 2) experiential approaches. The cognitive approach offers factual information about a specific

culture. This type of program usually includes environmental briefings and specific culture-oriented programs designed to provide trainees with factual information about a particular country. Currently, the cognitive approach dominates the field of cross-cultural training.

However, research has revealed that area studies alone cannot be effective when grooming employees for cross-cultural business situations (Tung, 1981). The experiential approach addresses this shortcoming, focusing on the training behaviors of trainees. This approach gives trainees the opportunity to engage in specific behaviors by participating in role playing, simulation, skill practice, and field activities. A classic example of the experiential approach, the Contrast-American approach, was used by Harris and Moran in 1987, Bennett in 1986, Gudykunst et at in 1977, and Barrett and Bass in 1976. Again, no empirical evidence was gathered to prove the effectiveness of this approach on training evaluation criteria. In short, neither popular training approach produced clear evidence of improved self-efficacy as the result of those programs. Thus, there is a growing interest in the development of a new technique which would enhance the overall efficacy of cross-cultural training programs.

Different Ego States in Cross-Cultural Interaction

The ability to identify the ego state of a person involved in communication is considered a very useful tool for understanding the various interpersonal communication patterns. The ego state represents a consistent pattern of feeling, thinking, and

experiencing related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behavior. Identifying the different ego states of the people involved in communication is the key to Transactional Analysis which was developed by Berne (1961 and 1964) and used to understand various types of interpersonal communication patterns. It has also been applied by researchers (Muriel, 1975; Albano, 1974) when analyzing people's behaviors in organizations. To understand the dynamic, but unique patterns of cross-cultural interaction more clearly, it is beneficial to understand the various ego states that people might have when they interact cross-culturally with foreigners.

As identified in domestic interpersonal interaction, three different ego states (Parent, Adult and Child) can also be found in cross-cultural settings. Recognizing these ego states, which have no relation to age or family status, is a very effective tool for understanding the various idiosyncratic reactions and communication patterns that occur in cross-cultural settings. Furthermore, identification of the different ego states is important in cross-cultural interaction, because when a certain type of ego state is combined with ethnocentrism, which is one of the venerable symptoms common to any kinds of ethnic groups (Sumner, 1976), it can cause a serious problem in intercultural interaction.

Child Ego State

The person with this type of ego state tends to react abruptly on the basis of pre-logical thinking and poorly differentiated or

distorted perceptions. This ego state contains all the impulses and feelings that come naturally to a child. Impulsive and uninhibited releases of emotions such as anger, hatred, and excitement toward the foreign culture are part of this ego state. The person with this ego state tends to have one frame of reference, his own, for evaluating and judging a foreigner's behavior. If he fails to understand the foreigner's behavior within his own frame of reference, he tends to criticize them immediately. Quick stereotyping of the foreigner based on an extreme or extraordinary case is another typical characteristic of this type of ego state. The person with a Child Ego State is quite intuitive, manipulative, submissive, and receptive. However, the emotions of this type of person can easily be divert from hatred to excitement or vice versa. He can become easily fascinated by the exotic elements of foreign culture or easily upset by other elements of the same culture. His behavior is quite emotional and unpredictable. Since hatred comes so quickly and groundlessly at an intuitive level, it can also be easily eliminated through positive cross-cultural education or training. In this sense, the efficacy of cross-cultural training can be maximized on a person with this type of ego state.

Parent Ego State

The person with this ego state seeks to enforce a set of standards borrowed from external sources such as parents or authority figures. This ego state has also only one single frame of reference, as in the case of Child Ego State, which was

developed by observing external sources. This type of person uses words such as "should" and "ought" when examining a foreign culture and tends to be very judgmental. This ego state also may contain deeply rooted prejudices and critical behaviors. In most cases, the person who has a Parent Ego State simply follows the attitude of his parents or authority figures and becomes very judgmental and critical about the foreign culture based on the standards borrowed from these external sources. Unlike the Child Ego State, however, the person with this ego state tries to control, refrain, and harbor his emotion rather than explicitly releasing it.

Since the Parent Ego State is not only controlling and critical, but also encouraging and supportive, the person with this ego state may encourage foreigners to work very hard to conform to his cultural values. A person with this ego state frequently has a sense of responsibility to educate foreigners on how to behave. He is apt to put himself in a parent's position and treat the foreigners like uneducated children. This type of person can easily insult foreigners by criticizing them and trying to preach and thrust his cultural values on them through education. Usually, the person with this ego state is apt to become a hard core ethnocentrist since he always believes he has firm and logical grounds for such an attitude. In this sense, the behaviors and attitudes of this type of person are hard to correct. Therefore, the effectiveness of traditional cross-cultural training programs may be minimal on this type of person.

Adult Ego State

The person with an Adult Ego State is concerned with

processing and organizing information on the basis of previous experience. He seeks knowledge, collects information, analyzes data, and tries experiments to test the various allegations made about foreigners. Even if he may occasionally have some cultural clash, his ego state is mature enough not to allow his emotion to intervene in evaluating and criticizing foreign culture. He tends to have a high level of cognitive complexity (Triandis, 1975). As Davidson (1975) correctly points out, a person with high cognitive complexity has several frameworks for the perception of the foreigner's behavior. He wants to develop multiple frames of reference which can enable him to decipher all the seemingly idiosyncratic signals sent by foreigners. If he fails to interpret the behavior of foreigners within his own frame of reference, he immediately tries to employ another frame of reference. If he still fails to understand them, he reserves his evaluation and conclusion until he collects sufficient information. He knows the danger of misjudgment by having only one single frame of reference. The person with an Adult Ego State is also aware of the danger of stereotyping foreigners based on extreme cases or shallow experiences. The person with this ego state tends to look at foreigners on an egalitarian basis and believes that they are ultimately as competent as he is in every respect - even if they have difficulty in expressing themselves. He always searches for the commonalities of each human being. He firmly believes that language is only a "veil" which obscures the true picture of the foreigner's ability and his culture. He tries, therefore, to see foreign culture through this "veil" by ignoring various sources of

"noises".

The major attributes of the three different ego states are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Ego State	Frame of Reference	Degree of Cognitive Complexity	Emotion	Attitudes
Child	single	low	uninhibited release	emotional impulsive
Parent	single	medium	refrain harbor	compelling assertive
Adult	multiple	high	reserve	inquisitive attentive

Only the person with an Adult Ego State can achieve a high level of cultural sensitivity and worldmindedness due to the fact that this ego state allows sufficient cross-cultural interaction which enables every aspect of the foreign culture to be seen. The person with Child or Parent Ego State cannot have enough cross-cultural interaction to delineate the true picture of foreign culture, because the negative experiences derived from these ego states would not allow the continuance of such unpleasant experiments. Thus the stage is set for perpetuating a negative psychological position for the next round of cross-cultural contact. Consequently, the focus of the cross-cultural training session must be how to help a trainee attain an Adult Ego State which would enable him to have the cross-cultural interactions needed for seeing through the "veil" to the true pictures of foreign culture.

Some verbal and non-verbal clues which identify the different ego states in cross-cultural context are listed in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

Child

Verbal clues: All Jews are..., Chink, Chicano, Gringo, Pollack, pig, disgusting, stupid, ridiculous, yuck, fantastic, awesome, cool, Is it ok to do.. ?

Nonverbal clues: Scowl, frown, excited, giggling, teasing, grumbling, shouting, emotional, submissive.

Parent

Verbal clues: Ought, should or you'd better, Don't tell me, Why don't you ?, I don't understand why, I told you, This is America - wake up, poor thing, Excuse me, honey, illogical, primitive, irrational, it's not fair, OK ? (high handed).

Nonverbal clues: clicking tongue, shaking head, patting on the head or shoulder, standing with arms folded, pointing a finger accusingly, sympathetic, bossy, encouraging, compelling, soothing, judgmental, commanding, assertive.

Adult

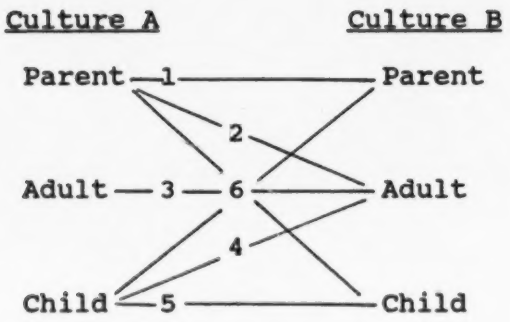
Verbal clues: Why?, Aha, I see, How do you feel about...?, How come ... ?, Is that right?, what do you think of... ?, what makes you do.... ?, That's why....

Nonverbal clues: Attentive, responsive, coordinating, reconciliating, inquiring, deliberative, curious, explorative, searching for commonness, empathic.

Patterns of Cross-cultural Interaction

Most cross-cultural interactions can be categorized according to the different combination of the ego state of the person involved. These patterns are illustrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3



Isotypic Interaction

Child-to-Child

If a person with a Child Ego State meets a foreigner with the same ego state (illustrated in Case 5 of Figure 4), the impulsive and uninhibited release of emotions may immediately create a significant clash. The cultural interaction between these types of people might end before they start to have a meaningful interaction. More often than not, a cross-cultural interaction between people of this type ends up in an exchange of personal insults at first contact and may even lead to violence. A typical example of this kind of interaction can be observed when an American with a Child Ego State calls a Mexican "You dirty chicano" and then the Mexican retorts, "You ugly gringo."

In an international business setting, where a man with a Child Ego State from a low context culture (where they put more emphasis on explicit and written contracts) meets a man of same ego state from a high context culture[1] (where they put more emphasis on implicit and verbal commitments), the former may say, "Everything must be in writing," while the latter may reply, "That's ridiculous, we can't do business with such an immature

person." Even if they recognize that they can mutually benefit from interacting, their pattern of isotypic interaction will not permit any further communication between the parties. If they are lucky enough to have a positive initial contact, the joys and excitement at the intuitive level can easily change to hatred or dislike if the other party does not behave as originally expected. The person with this ego state may like a foreigner only when a foreigner's ideas or thoughts are congruent with his own. But this affinity can easily turn sour when discords arise. The person with a Child Ego State lacks consistency in showing emotion toward the foreign culture thereby precluding his ability to thoroughly understand the true picture of foreign culture.

Parent-to-Parent

When a person from Culture A with a Parent Ego State meets a foreigner from Culture B with the same ego state, as in case 1 of Figure 4, both parties, from the beginning of their contact, will try to educate, persuade, and convince the other of their own cultural values. Each party has his own sets of values, borrowed from his parent, and firmly believes that all foreigners should respect and follow these cultural values. He simply assumes that foreigners who do not conform to his cultural system are incapable of understanding its benefits and conveniences. Therefore, when he comes across foreigners who do not conform to his cultural norms, he feels a responsibility to educate these "poor, ignorant" people. The following Oriental-American discourse is a typical example of this type of interaction: (Oriental) "In our country we always take

off our shoes at home. It keeps our house clean." (American) "We never take off our shoes at home. It would be very inconvenient if we had to put on and take off our shoes every time we went in and out." (Oriental) " But if you take off your shoes, it would also be good for the health of your feet. Why don't you give it a try?". As the example demonstrates, the dialogue between these people tends to be parallel without a reconciliatory conclusion.

To further illustrate, envision a scenario where an isotypic business interaction between two people each having a Parent Ego State takes place. The parties involved are a Japanese businessman with high context culture and a American businessman with low context culture. Since the ego state of both parties involved is the parent state, both parties will immediately try to convince each other of the benefits of having or not having a written contract. As cited by researchers (Sullivan and Peterson; 1982, Peterson and Shimada; 1978), an American businessman may tenaciously try to educate or persuade a Japanese partner about the dangers of not having a written contract. Meanwhile, the Japanese partner may try to persuade the American that the most important thing they have to do for a successful joint venture is build trust between the partners. The Japanese partner believes that once trust is established, disputes can be settled amicably with more flexibility between the parties, even if there is no detailed written agreement. To the Japanese partner, writing a detailed contract is childish and a reflection of distrust between the parties. As Wright (1979) points out, a written agreement is only a symbol of commitment to cooperate rather than an actual

working, binding and legal document. A typical dialogue in this case may be as follows:

Man from low context culture	Man from high context culture
Why don't we put all the details in a contract to avoid possible disputes in the future?	We believe too many details in a contract will deprive us of flexibility in the future.
	The most important thing is to build trust between us.
Having a contract which covers every possible case in the future would minimize ambiguity and unpleasant arguments later.	As long as we trust each other we can solve the problem amicably. Too detailed a contract can be a constraint rather than a benefit in the settling of problems.

At this point, the Japanese businessman from the high context culture may start to think that the other party is so distrustful that he should not do business with him. As long as both parties maintain a Parent Ego State, this type of negotiation is bound to fail, because neither party has any intention of making a concession. Both parties firmly believe their way of making a "contract" is the best way and will work very hard to try to convince the other party by means of a "reasonable" explanation.

If a person who believes himself to be mature and educated enough to take the role of a parent is continuously treated by the other party like a child, he will be insulted and have his pride hurt. It is quite conceivable that neither party would care to continue this type of interaction and communication between the parties would be reduced significantly. The most dangerous part of this situation is that each party believes they have a firm ground to support their convictions.

Adult-to-Adult

The most desirable cross-cultural interaction possible is the interaction between two parties with the Adult Ego State (illustrated in Case 3 of Figure 4). Both parties will work hard trying to understand each other by mobilizing every possible method. They try not to pay much attention to distractions such as language and gestures which are inevitable in the process of cross-cultural interaction. They believe such distractions are only the result of differences at the surface level and try to find commonalities at a more fundamental level between the two cultures by looking "through the veil". They have multiple frames of reference for interpreting various signals sent by foreigners and sensitive enough to ignore all the "noises" coming from the cultural collision at the surface level. Some characteristic patterns of isotypic cross-cultural communication are illustrated below.

Child	To	Child
Eating eel is gross and disgusting.		Eating stuffed turkey is stupid.
Parent	**To**	**Parent**
Eating eel is not civilized.		I don't think it's civilized to kill thousands turkeys for celebrating holidays.
It is cannibalistic and primitive to eat such a disgusting creeping animal.		It is grotesque to plug stuffing in the poor creature's rectum.
Eating turkey and eel is completely different.		What makes a difference?
Adult	**To**	**Adult**

How did your people come to eat eel?	I think they must have begun during an extreme shortage of foods in the olden days. What else would you do if you didn't have any other way to survive?
I see. I think it would be better to survive eating eel rather than starving to death. I also heard some people eat snake, too. But my question is why do you still eat it even in the absence of such a shortage?	We all know that it's not easy to change cultural habit by logical reasoning once established.

Non-isotypic Communication

Parent to Child

When a person with a Parent Ego State meets a foreigner with a Child Ego State, or vice-versa, (illustrated in Case 6 of Figure 4) the person with the Child Ego State immediately will display emotions such as anger and hatred towards the foreigner. The person with the Parent Ego State will try to reprimand or correct the other's behavior with a limited amount of patience. A typical example of this kind of interaction may be as follows. An American with a Child Ego State may say to an Oriental eating eel, "Yuck, eating eel is disgusting." An Oriental with a Parent Ego State would respond by saying, "It is a very wholesome food. Why don't you try it ?" Then the American may say, " I will never eat that kind of stuff even if I starve to death". The Oriental may respond "Eel is one of the most nutritious and high protein foods. Besides, it is very delicious. Give it a try."

Again, imagine the discourse that would occur in a meeting between a businessman from a low context culture with a Parent Ego

State and a businessman from a high context culture with Child Ego State. The former would tenaciously try to teach or persuade the benefits of having a written contract. However, the latter may jump to the conclusion that the person who requires this level of meticulous detail in the contract is distrustful and does not deserve the partnership. The person with the Parent Ego State may try to persuade or educate the person with the Child Ego State through a couple of initial rounds of contact. But his patience will soon run out, and he will give up his efforts after facing the continuous bold, untamed, and rude responses from the person with the Child Ego State. He may conclude that the best way to deal with this type of immature and childish person is to avoid him and withdraw from the interaction. Both parties will soon become tired of this type of interaction and avoid any further contact.

This type of interaction usually does not lead to outright fighting or boisterous arguments, because the person with the Parent Ego State avoids such occurrences. He tries very hard to stay away from this childish foreigner because he does not want his Parent Ego State hurt from this type of interaction. However, the borrowed set of standards about foreign culture that constitute the Parent Ego State are reinforced throughout this process. The accumulation of negative feelings toward the foreign culture would discourage him from making any more contact.

Not all Parent-to-Child transactions, however, necessarily begin as negative encounters since one aspect of the Child Ego State is submissive and receptive. When some features of the foreign culture presented by the person with the Parent Ego State

are pleasant or agreeable, then the person of the Child Ego State can be receptive and excited about foreign culture. However, the attitudes of this type of person are not reliable and are hard to predict, because his excitement is based solely on the coincidental congruence of some elements of foreign culture with his own values. His enthusiasm can easily change to dislike or hatred when other aspects of the same culture clash with his values. Consequently, interaction with a person of the Child Ego State, whether it is positive or negative, is bound to be ephemeral because of a lack of reliability in his attitudes toward foreign culture.

Another crucial element that can influence the ego state of the parties in cross-cultural communication is what language they are using. If they are speaking the mother tongue of one of the parties, the person whose mother tongue is used is apt to have a Parent Ego State, because he has a comparative advantage over the other party. The person who has to use the other party's mother tongue tends to have a Child Ego State because of his limited capability to command the language. The person who is forced to take the Child Ego State is apt to develop a considerable amount of frustration towards the person who is speaking in his mother tongue. Sometimes this frustration develops to a point of "autistic hostility"[2] (Newcomb, 1947) which is often found among children who have a limited ability to communicate effectively. This emotional response creates enormous problems in an intercultural transaction. Most American managers abroad speak English not only because English is an international language but also because of their limited capability of commanding the local language. Therefore,

American managers tend to have a Parent Ego State. Conversely, local managers have a significant disadvantage stemming from their linguistic inability and often display a certain amount of autistic hostility towards American mangers. The local managers with limited linguistic capability often unconsciously take a Child Ego State and release this type of hostility towards the expatriate managers. This response could easily aggravate the situation and make the interaction between the two parties very negative.

Adult-to-Parent or Adult-to-Child

As discussed earlier, an Adult-to-Adult communication is the most desirable pattern in cross-cultural interaction. However, it is not necessary to have the Adult Ego State on both ends to have a positive cross-cultural interaction. A person with the Adult Ego State on one end, as illustrated in Case 2 or 4 of Figure 4, can still make cross-cultural interaction positive. The person with the Child Ego State or the Parent Ego State may hurt the feelings of their counterpart either by displaying uninhibited emotions or by trying to provide inappropriate "parental" advice. However, the person with the Adult Ego State would refrain himself from reacting immediately until he collected a sufficient amount of information. His knowledge and patience in dealing with a foreign culture would make it possible to have a meaningful interaction between the parties, and this could eventually help them overcome many groundless biases and the stereotyping of foreign cultures.

If the ego states of the parties involved in cross-cultural interaction are other than the Adult Ego State, such an interaction

may end before they have a sufficient amount of interaction required for fair evaluation of the foreign culture. This system can result in perpetuating their negative cross-cultural attitudes. A person who has the Adult Ego State knows that it is not easy to understand a foreign culture and will take time to get to know it before reaching conclusions or relying on stereotypes. He does not easily give up trying to understand a foreign culture and continues cross-cultural interaction even after an initial negative experience. So, it is not impossible to make a cross-cultural interaction positive by having an the Adult Ego State only on one side. This type of person would contribute significantly to the generation of positive cross-cultural interactions no matter what type of ego state the foreigner might have. He would listen carefully and thoroughly analyze different ideas without letting his intuitive emotions or borrowed set of standards intervene in evaluating the foreign culture. He would patiently try to extend cross-cultural interaction in order to collect a sufficient amount of first hand information.

Since ethnocentrism and xenophobia stem from cultural ignorance, while xenophilism and polycentrism tend to be the products of shallow knowledge of the foreign culture, achievement of the Adult Ego State is a prerequisite to improving cultural sensitivity. The Adult Ego State makes it possible to ignore the various "noises" in cross-cultural communication and expand the intercultural communication channel by accommodating any type of frequencies generated by foreign message senders.

Conclusion

Positive cross-cultural interaction is ensured only when the parties involved can have effective and pleasant communication. Cultural differences alone do not always disrupt effective communication and do not necessarily cause negative experiences in cross-cultural interaction. Only when the message sender's ego state is not compatible with that of receiver from a different culture do cultural differences between the parties become problematic and start to generate negative experiences and impede effective communication.

Accordingly, cross-cultural training programs should help trainees understand their current ego states and achieve the most desirable Adult Ego State. A clear understanding of the trainees' ego states and the major attributes of the most desirable ego state will undoubtedly help the trainees envision the ultimate goal of the program and thereby improve the efficacy of a cognitive cross-cultural training program. Identification of different ego states will also offer a considerable amount of practical application for improving the efficacy of an experiential program. Finally, Understanding different ego states will provide an additional variety to the role playing method of the conventional experiential approach which has been solely dependent upon the nationalies of the target culture.

Notes

1. High and low context culture were introduced by Edward T. Hall (1976) to understand the different orientation of the cultures. In a low-context culture, messages must be explicit, only the written contract is binding. Commitments and contracts tend to be long enough to contain details for all possible disputes in the future.

In high context culture, verbal commitment is more important than a written contract because human relationships and status are the most important factors in making business decisions. Examples of countries with low context culture include the U.S., Switzerland, and Germany. Examples of countries with high context culture include Japan and Far Eastern and Middle Eastern countries.

2. "Autistic hostility" is described by Newcomb (1947) as the hostile attitudes towards others characterized by withdrawal and self-isolation resulting from communication barriers. This phenomenon is pronounced particularly among the children who are incapable of providing an efficient response or feedback to the original message sender because of their linguistic incapability.

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